It's a common situation. A school gets a few computers, and then they sit idle while the teachers warily wonder what to do with them. Well, the Prospect Hill Elementary School, in New Berlin, Wisconsin, faced this problem back in 1983 when it was given three C-64s.

Now, three years later, the 350-student school has an active computer lab with confident teachers using it, thanks to the combined efforts of dedicated parent volunteers, interested teachers, and the school's administration.

**How It All Began**

Bonnie Nebel, a parent in the New Berlin school district, contacted me early this year to tell me the story of how Prospect Hill got started with C-64s.

The parents' organization, called the Parent Advisory Board (PAB), had been interested in getting computers into the school since 1981, but had not made much progress until the 1982–83 school year, when the school board allotted money for computer funding. This went to buy three C-64s. At that time, however, neither the teachers nor the principal knew what to do with the computers, and they had no time or money to learn.

Nebel joined the PAB that year, and when the other parents found out that she was familiar with computers and was willing to share that knowledge, they decided to start a parent volunteer program to help the teachers learn to use the computers. They appointed Nebel as coordinator of this project.

Over the course of two months, Nebel and the PAB implemented the volunteer program, which sent parents into the school to help in the small computer lab, thus making it more readily available and attractive to the teachers. Three years later, the parent volunteers are still at work in this capacity, with eight volunteers currently active in the school.

**How They Got Started**

Actually locating interested parents was quite easy. Word of the project quickly spread, and Nebel, along with another computer-literate mother, volunteered to hold training sessions for the parents. After a couple of two-hour sessions, they let the volunteer parents go into the computer lab as teacher aides.

These early training sessions focused mainly on fundamental information. A C-64 fact sheet was created. Volunteers were introduced to the keyboard to learn how it both resembled and differed from a traditional typewriter. They discussed floppy disks—how to handle them, how to place one in the drive and how to load a program.

The volunteers had no specific computer background. As Nebel puts it, "They just had to know how to turn on the computer and load a program. Then, it was up to the teachers."

Nebel coordinated the parent volunteer project with the school's principal, Lester Graves, who set up a computer lab schedule for all of the teachers. The first year, every class had a scheduled time period in the computer lab. But not all the teachers took advantage of this. Says Nebel, "It was rough then. We'd have half the class sitting at the computers—three per computer—and the other half sitting at their desks doing other things.

**What Did the Parents Do?**

The parents' function in the lab was primarily to turn on all of the computers and load in the appropriate software. During the class session, the volunteers would answer students' questions, and at the end of the class would turn off the equipment and put away the software.

Some of the parents with teaching backgrounds would also help the teachers plan classes and sometimes actually teach lessons themselves. Ideally, parents should only monitor the class, not actually teach. However, during the early years, this was the only feasible way to get things done.

Each year, the Prospect Hill teachers have learned more about the computers and how to use them in their classes. Even more important, they have gained confidence. Although the parent volunteers are still used in many computer classes, some teachers now prefer to handle the entire job themselves.

**What Are the Advantages?**

Nebel is quick to point out that teachers just don't have the time to
load up all the machines before their
kids arrive for class and then shut off
everything afterwards. The parent vol-
unteers arrive before the class begins,
so the computers are ready to go when
the teacher arrives with the class.

“Now, that’s where the parent vol-
unteers are really helping out,” says
Nebel.

Another advantage is the collabora-
tion of volunteers and teachers in
selecting software. The volunteers
have the opportunity to test out new
software and can recommend the
programs that are likely to work well
with the class.

An additional benefit is simply the
presence of another adult in the com-
puter lab to answer questions. Says
Nebel, “We have 12 computers in
there now, and when you have 24 kids
on 12 computers, questions do come
up. With the older kids, it’s a lot easier.
They can load their own programs and
even tutor others. It’s with the younger
grades (K-3) that the parent volun-
teers are most helpful.”

What Are the Problems?

Did the parents organization have
any problems in getting the com-
puter lab going at Prospect Hill?

“Yes,” says Nebel. “The biggest prob-
lem was convincing the principal and
the teachers that they really did want
the computers. The first time some
of the teachers looked at the C-64s,
they thought to themselves, ‘Who
needs this?’” Nebel is quick to add,
though, that there has been a tre-
mendous change over the last three
years in the teachers’ perceptions of
computers.

How did this come about? A turn-
ing point came early in 1985, when
Susan Copp, a former teacher, be-
came the president of the PAB. Her
goal was to get the computer lab mov-
ing in Prospect Hill, so she consulted
Nebel about what ought to be done.
Nebel’s answer was direct: “You’re
not going to be able to do anything
until you get the teachers trained.”

The teachers needed to be taught
how to utilize computers in their
courses. In some cases, the parent
volunteers were doing so much of
the work in the computer lab that
the teachers weren’t advancing their
own computer know-how. Moreover,
they didn’t have the time to further
develop their skills.

Teacher Training

Copp and Nebel decided to team
up to provide the needed teacher
training themselves. They offered
free sessions during the summer of
1985, inviting the teachers and the
principal to attend classes one after-
noon a week throughout the summer.

Says Nebel, “When Mr. Graves, the
principal, took our class and started
to understand what this was all about
and see what the computers could
do, his attitude really changed. That’s
what really turned things around.”

In the 1985-86 school year, a big
change is evident. The teachers feel
more confident now with the com-
puters, and they are bringing their
students into the lab more often. The
PAB has contributed by donating
money this year specifically for teach-
er training, rather than for buying
more equipment.

Hands-On Computer Training

The training sessions during that
first summer were so successful that
Copp and Nebel formalized the course
and applied for state accreditation.
They now have a partnership venture
called Hands-On Computer Training,
which is an accredited course specifi-
cally aimed at teaching teachers how
to use computers in the classroom.

Briefly, the Hands-On Computer
Training course is a six-unit course
covering the keyboard, disks, edu-
cational software, LOGO, word pro-
cessing and programming. All of
these topics are addressed with
consideration for the specific grade
levels taught by the teachers.

Nebel and Copp go to the schools
in the district that have computers
and do the training right there on
the premises. They use both C-64s
and Apples. “But,” says Nebel, “the
C-64 is our main machine, even
though we do handle Apples. We
think that Commodore is the best
tool for education.”

It’s interesting to note that one-
third of a 22-student fourth grade
class at Prospect Hill have their own
C-64s at home; one has an Apple.
Their teacher also has a C-64 at home,
as do four others in the school.

Conclusion

These two educators have done an
admirable job in promoting the use
of computers in education, and they
have kindly donated to The Resource
Center a list of recommended edu-
cational software that they distribute
at their Hands-On training sessions.
(See Table 1.)

Furthermore, Susan Copp is in the
process of evaluating the available
Commodore public domain educa-
tional software and will share that
list with us when she finishes the
project.

If you’d like more information
about the Prospect Hill computer
program, contact the principal, Mr.
Lester Graves, at Prospect Hill School,
5330 S. Racine Ave., New Berlin, WI

RUN JULY 1986 / 75
The Resource Center

Scholastic
- Computergarten (P-1)
- Rainbow Keyboarding (2-3)
- Spell Diver (1-up)
- Bank Street Writer (4-up)

Spinnaker
- Alphabet Zoo (P-3)
- Facemaker (P-3)
- Delta Drawing (P-7)
- Kids on Keys (P-4)
- Rhymes and Riddles (K-5)
- Kidwriter (K-4)
- Snooper Troops (5-up)

Weekly Reader
- Stickybear Math (1-4)
- Stickybear Town Builder (1-3)
- Other Stickybear titles
The Learning Company
- Reader Rabbit (P-2)
- Rocky's Room (4-up)
- Addition magician (1-5)

Sunburst
- The Factory (4-9)
- The Pond (2-up)
- Teasers by Tobys (4-up)

Broderbund
- The Print Shop (5-up)
- The Print Shop Graphics Library (3-up)
- The Print Shop Companion (5-up)

Simon & Schuster
- Kermits Electronic Storymaker (P-2)

Sierra
- Donald Duck's Playground (2-6)

Grolier Electronic Publishing
- Friendly Filer (3-9)
- Easy Graph (3-9)
- EduCalc (5-12)
- The Information Connection (5-12)

Kool Technologies
- Muppet Learning Keys (P-1)

CBS Software
- Webster: The Words Game (1-up)
- Coast-to-Coast America (3-up)

Fisher-Price
- Alpha Build (P-3)
- Logic Levels (2-9)

Springboard Software
- Mask Parade (P-5)

Daedilion
- Math Blaster! (1-6)

DesignWare
- States and Trails (6-up)
- Remember! (7-up)
- Spellgraph (2-9)
- The Body Transparent (3-11)

Sight & Sound Music Software
- Incredible Musical Keyboard
- Kawasaki Synthesizer
- Music Processor

Commodore Business Machines
- LOGO (P-up)

53151. For more information about teacher training and the parent volunteer project, write Bonnie Nebel or Susan Copp at Hands-On Computer Training, 19975 W. Julius Heil Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

If you are using Commodore computers for educational purposes (at home or in school) and would like to share your experiences through The Resource Center, write a letter detailing the equipment you're using, the subject areas you're involved in, the grade level or age of your students, software that has been effective and any other information you feel like including. Send letters to:

Margaret Morabito
The Resource Center
do RUN Editorial
80 Pine St.
Peterborough, NH 03458

You can also leave messages in my online mailboxes: ComputServe (70616,714); Delphi (MARGM); and QuantumLink (MARGM). The Resource Center now has its own online SIG in the Learning Center on QuantumLink.